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ABSTRACT

An exploratory course was designed to give secondary school students exposure to all languages in the foreign language curriculum, in sequence, so they may decide which, if any, to enroll in. This course was begun in 1979 to counter an elitist image of foreign language courses. Course topics encouraged students to explore the languages fully by: being activity-oriented; facilitating adaptation to new sound and grammatical systems; dealing with major cultural concepts; including intriguing sounds, expressions, and gestures of the target languages; addressing the relationship of geography to occupations, food, clothing, and so on; dealing with the language's history and contributions to American culture; attempting to elicit interest in the target countries; being addressed, when possible, in a single class period; encouraging values clarification; and promoting career awareness. The languages (French, German, Latin, and Spanish) each were responsible for 20-22 class meetings during the semester. Each of the four language teachers involved developed activities from the standard unit topics provided. The course has been well received by teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Appended materials include: lists of specific activities for each language, a 1982-83 course schedule, results of teacher and student surveys regarding the course, student grade statistics for 1981-82, and the district's total foreign language enrollments for the fall semesters of 1975 through 1982. (MSE)

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"FLEX: A Foreign Language Experience"

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Introduction

Exploratory foreign language courses are not new to the 1980's. Courses under the umbrella title of Foreign Language Exploratory have existed around the country for the past 60 years.

Lorraine Strasheim, Wilga Rivers, and Frank Grittner among other prominent foreign language educators have also discussed the merits and requirements of exploratory courses. ACTFL has devoted at least two preconference workshops to this theme -- in 1974 and as recently as 1982.

Interest in foreign language exploratory programs appears to be directly related to interest in foreign languages themselves. As the values of foreign language study are discussed, the values of an exploratory course are also discussed.

A Definition

An exploratory foreign language course can be defined generally as a course designed to allow students to experience some area of foreign language study for the purpose of

acquainting students with language and culture. It also helps determine students' interest and potential for further foreign language study.

The formats for realizing these goals vary. Briefly outlined they may include:

1. General Language course: students learn about the nature of language and other generalities of language study;
2. Regular Level I course: students study one language for a determined period of time and then decide whether or not to continue the study of that particular language;
3. Trial-study course: students sample each language for a few days before registering for a sequence course; and
4. FLEX: all students are exposed to all languages offered in the regular sequence for an equal amount of time at the completion of which they decide whether or not to elect one language in the regular sequence.

The Waukesha Plan

The main purpose of this paper is to discuss in detail the foreign language exploratory course as it exists in the Waukesha Public Schools. This course can be said to fall under number 4 of the previously listed possibilities of foreign language exploratory courses, i.e., FLEX.

FLEX in Waukesha was offered for the first time in the fall of 1979. It was offered in response to the middle school students' need to explore, as well as to abolish the elitist image which many people feel characterize foreign language courses.

FLEX helps all students discover their potential for foreign languages, which also includes the role of foreign languages as they relate to the students' future careers. Futhermore, students realize that they are not alone in the world, that others can be different without being better or worse.

FLEX gives every student the opportunity to develop an appreciation and to experience vicariously different cultures

of the world. Since language is the principal vehicle of culture, understanding languages is of the utmost importance: understanding languages is understanding people.

The student's role in this course is that of an active explorer: one who attempts to imitate the language and the culture of the people he/she is exploring. In order to ensure that the students do participate the following guidelines were established:

1. topics will be activity-oriented;
2. activities will facilitate an adaptation to new sound and grammatical systems;
3. topics should deal with major cultural concepts;
4. topics should include the intriguing sounds, gestures, and expressions of the target culture;
5. topics should include the relationship of geograhical location, and occupations, foods, clothing, etc.;
6. topics should deal with the history of the language and include the ethnic contributions to the United States;

7. topics should attempt to elicit interest in the target countries;
8. topics should be dealt with, when possible, within a single class period;
9. value clarification through cross-cultural study is encouraged; and
10. each language is responsible for the infusion of career awareness into the curriculum.

Each language, i.e., French, German, Latin, and Spanish, is responsible for 20-22 class meetings per duration of this semester course. Currently all seventh grade students in the Waukesha middle schools are required to take the course during one of the two semesters in their seventh grade program. Foreign language words and expressions are introduced within a meaningful context. Since the foreign language is used and the foreign culture is studied, a specialist in that language teaches that segment of the course. Hence, four teachers (one from each language) teach a part of each section of FLEX. A schedule is provided for the school year so that each language

is equally represented. Standard report card grades are given for achievement. Extensive continuous study (five years) of all the languages is made available as an elective beginning in the eighth grade.

Each of the units can be used in a variety of ways. The individual teacher looks at each activity cover sheet and decides how he/she can best use it. Some of the activities might be conducted in small groups, and some in a large group setting. The exact arrangement of materials and/or activities is left up to the discretion of the individual teacher. A concern is that the course not end up a popularity contest among teachers, therefore it is very important that no new units or activities be added without consulting the department chairman.

Each student is required to have a notebook reserved solely for the FLEX course. The teacher encourages each student to use the notebook to its fullest. The notebook is also used as a means of evaluation. In addition to the notebook, grading for this course is based also on projects, and

quizzes and tests. However, evaluation does not necessarily have to take written form. The forms of evaluation vary from activity to activity just as each activity varies.

During the first group of each semester, five extra days are provided in which the group receives a general introduction to language and culture. Each teacher uses five special activities with his/her group to accomplish this task. These five activities are: Personal Data Survey, Student/Parent Interview, Heelotia/Hokia Simulation, "A Word in Your Ear" tape and activity, and "As Others See Us" activity.

Also during each semester two days are set aside to discuss specifically the value of foreign language study, the foreign language program in the Waukesha Public Schools, and to have the students evaluate the course themselves. Each teacher is also expected to evaluate each activity as it is being taught in order to facilitate the department's evaluation of the course.

The course now in its fourth year has been well received by teachers and students, as well as by parents and administrators.

Revision of the activities is constantly taking place in order to make it the best course possible. In keeping with the theme of this conference, the FLEX classroom in Waukesha can rightfully be called a "gateway for growth".

List of FLEX Activities

Following is a list of activities used in the Waukesha Public Schools' FLEX course. They are listed by language.

FRENCH: Names, Greetings, Introduction to France, French Scrapbook, French Culture Survey, French Culture Capsules, French Culture Through Advertising, Stereotype Unit, French Throughout the World: La Francophonie, The French Influence in Wisconsin, Going to School in France, The French Alphabet, Learning Numbers, Animals: Les Animaux, Body Parts, Les Sports, Kinesics, Crêpes, French Holidays, Exploring Careers in Foreign Languages, McDonalds in français, French Family, French Expressions in English, Transportation in France, Le Métro, Un Voyage à Paris, Shopping in France,

French and French-Canadian Fairy Tales, French Money, Days and Months, French Cuisine, Colors.

GERMAN: German Culture Survey, Die Kinder auf dem Flugplatz, Introduction to German I-IV, German Alphabet, Days of the Week/Months of the Year, Telling Time, German Money, Names: Assignment and Practice, Culture Assimilators, Fairy Tales, Shopping, School Life in Germany, Geography of German-speaking Countries, Foods, Greetings, What is a Youth Hostel?, Exploring Careers in Foreign Languages, Metric System, German Songs, Die Farben, Die Familie, Sports in Germany, German Folk Customs and Festivals, Die Tiere, Das Essen, German Holiday Customs, Das Haus, Culture Capsules, Passport to Germany.

LATIN: Roman Clothing; Domus Romana; Familiar Objects in Classroom; Walk Through Rome!; Parts of the Body; Counting and Numbers; Latin Names; Greetings and Geography and Names; Roman Foods; Roman

Civilization Through Art; Exploring Careers in Foreign Languages; The Calendar, Time, and Dates; Drama; Latin Words Used in English; Roman Dominoes; Greek and Roman Sports; Animalia; Introduction and Pronunciation; The Family; "A Roman Family Comes to Life"; Mythology; Comitas Diei; Miscellanea.

SPANISH: Spanish Influence, Search, Mexican-American Story, Spanish Explorers, Transportation, Indian Civilization and Field Trip, Hispanic Culture in America, Hispanic Geography, The Bullfight, Tu y Usted, Foods of Mexico, Spanish Names, Puerto Rico, La Casa Mexicana, Educational and Racial Composition, The Weekend, De Compras, United States Influence, Turismo, Las Chicos Aeropuerto, Stores in Spain, The Coasts and Beaches of Spain, The Spanish Worker, ¿Quién soy yo?, Customs: The Tertulia, Gestures, Passport to Mexico, Getting a Passport, Culture Capsules, Numbers, Clothing,

Spanish Geography, Famous Spanish Monuments and Places, South American Plants and Animals, Spanish Imports and Exports, Exploring Careers in Foreign Languages.

1982 - 1983 FLEX Schedule

Semester I

8/30 through 10/5 - - -	Group I:	1. General Introduction 2. Language
10/6 through 11/5 - - -	Group II:	Language
11/8 through 12/10 - -	Group III:	Language
12/13 through 1/20 - -	Group IV:	1. Language 2. Value of Foreign Language Study, Waukesha Public Schools Language Program 3. Evaluation

Semester II

1/24 through 3/2 - - -	Group I:	1. General Introduction 2. Language

3. Value of Foreign Language Study, Waukesha Public Schools Foreign Language Program

3/3 through 3/31 - - - Group II: Language

4/11 through 5/10 - - - Group III: Language

5/11 through 6/8 - - - Group IV: 1. Language

2. Evaluation

Teacher Survey Results

In April 1982, the Waukesha Public Schools FLEX teachers were asked to respond to a short questionnaire evaluating the effectiveness of the FLEX course. Nine out of eleven teachers responded. The results follow:

1. Do you feel the Course Objectives of FLEX are being met?

   A. To abolish the elitist image of foreign language learning. (Yes - 9) Comments:

   We have all calibers of students taking languages now.

   I see more students trying a foreign language, who

may not have before because they thought they couldn't.

Because I emphasize the fact that all can learn. With the mixture of kids in just one class, they themselves see that everyone can learn.

It's open to all students, and the fact that a great majority succeed is proof to the idea that all can succeed in a foreign language.

B. To provide the student an opportunity to discover new worlds through exploration. (Yes - 9) Comments:

The FLEX teachers combine both language and culture to create a new world for students.

They discover many different things about the new cultures and can compare.

Just by using the different units in the different languages.

C. To familiarize the student with the cultures of the people who speak French, German, Latin, and Spanish. (Yes - 9) Comments:

Our units are set up to teach this.

The entire curriculum materials are made up of this.

D. To provide the student with opportunities to understand and practice new language sounds. (Yes - 9)

Comments:

Each language teaches vocabulary which gives students a chance to learn and to practice.

E. To acquaint the student with the role of foreign languages in career options. (Yes - 9) Comments:

I do try to point out how helpful a language can be. Some units lend themselves to such a discussion.

A fair amount of time is spent on this.

Maybe to a lesser extent than the other objectives.

2. How do you feel about teaching FLEX?

Comments:

I enjoy it. It's a neat feeling introducing a new world to the seventh graders and seeing their reactions.

I love it!

I enjoy the fun, exploring feeling you try to instill in the students.

Love it!

I enjoy putting the first spark of interest in the students. I like meeting all the kids. The material covered is easy for me, so I can concentrate on the students.

I enjoy teaching it. It is a course that is fun to teach because most students are receptive. It also allows the teacher a great deal of flexibility.

3. How do you think the students feel about the FLEX course?

Comments:

The course provides variety and almost all the students are able to find some things of interest. But you can't please everyone all the time.

The majority of the students have a very positive attitude toward FLEX.

Pretty good for the most part.

I think they enjoy it. For many it is exciting and new and they want to learn. Of course, you always get a few who show no enthusiasm.

4. What are the strengths of the FLEX course?

Comments:

Everyone has the opportunity to take it.

The variety of languages gives students a better chance to choose what language to take if any.

Is taught by experts.

Good variety of activities is available.

Teaching that other customs and cultures may be different, but that they are ok.

Teachers get a chance to meet all the kids.

Diversity for the students and the teachers, in terms of material covered and students encountered.

Being able to teach things you are interested in and of interest to students. Flexibility!

It allows students of all abilities to have a chance

at finding out about foreign languages.

It presents a good description of career opportunities.

Students are allowed to explore their own interests.

The fact that we hopefully help students to develop a more open mind and a better attitude toward those people and those things that are different from what they are used to.

5. What are the weaknesses of the FLEX course?

Comments:

The scheduling for second semester students. The biggest complaint is that second semester students must turn in their program card before they have had all four languages.

Periods of instruction are sometimes too short. Would be nice if it could be taught in the sixth grade.

Some students are not cooperative.

6. Additional Comments:

Most parents think it is a great idea. They think the exposure is great for the kids.

In general, the course is progressing well. The yearly curriculum revisions ensure that the materials stay up-to-date.

Most parents I have talked to are very enthusiastic about our course!

Student Survey Results

Each semester students in FLEX are asked to evaluate the course. Below are abbreviated results of the student survey from the second semester of the 1981 - 1982 school year.

1. I like the idea of this "Exploring Foreign Languages" course.

   A great deal - 100

   Much - 130

   Some - 187

   Not at all - 33

2. I learned things I never knew before.

   A great deal - 166

Much - 174

Some - 103

Not at all - 5

3. After having taken this course, I think foreign languages are for everyone.

A great deal - 83

Much - 113

Some - 210

Not at all - 42

4. Now, I'm going to take a foreign language next year.

Yes - 294

No - 154

If, no, why not?

86 - Don't want to; not interested; don't like it; like other classes more; etc.

36 - Taking it in 9th grade or later

32 - No room on schedule; no time; conflict on schedule

5. I feel the students in this class wanted to cooperate with the teachers.

A great deal - 36

Much - 113

Some - 235

Not at all - 64

6. Which activities did you like the most?

147 - Foods; menus

68 - Projects; posters; art group activities

56 - Learning the language; words

43 - Numbers

54 - God's eye

38 - Games

37 - Mythology

36 - Bingo

29 - Calendar

28 - Alphabet

22 - Plays

20 - Boule

20 - Body parts

20 - Colors

19 - Sports

19 - Culture; customs; people

18 - Animals; parts

15 - Crosswords; puzzles; word search

12 - Horoscope; zodiac

11 - Family tree

11 - Rome and Roman times

10 - History

10 - Maps

9 - Mosaics in Latin

8 - Language lab; use headphones
7 - Names
7 - Working with partners; friends; groups
7 - All
5 - Houses
5 - Fairy tales
5 - School systems
5 - Discussions
4 - Spartacus
3 - Name tag

2 - Personal experiences of teachers in visiting another country.

1 - I thought FLEX was a neat experience.

1 - I had a lot of fun learning about different languages.

1 - Meeting new teachers.

1 - Everything; I learned a lot.

7. Which activities did you like the least?

121 - Written work; taking notes; worksheets; reports; summaries; homework
71 - Work from books
42 - Tests; quizzes
22 - All were ok
16 - History
16 - Filmstrips
16 - Clothing
15 - Houses

15 - Everything
15 - Numbers
13 - Coloring
12 - Foods; menu
11 - Family tree
9 - Bullfighting
8 - Roman numbers
8 - Alphabet
8 - Animal pictures and sounds
7 - Sports
6 - School systems
6 - Maps
5 - Memorizing
5 - Geography
4 - Fairy tales
3 - Singing
3 - Myths
1 - Student-parent interview
1 - Hokey game

Student Grades

1. FLEX students' report card grades for the first semester of the 1981 - 1982 school year.

A - 201	(42%)*	*rounded to the nearest
B - 161	(34%)*	full percentage point
C - 81	(17%)*	
D - 33	(7%)*	
F - 1		
477	(100%)	

2. FLEX students' report card grades for the second semester of the 1981 - 1982 school year.

A -	183	(38%)*
B -	196	(41%)*
C -	83	(17%)*
D -	15	(3%)*
F -	6	(1%)*
	483	(100%)

*rounded to the nearest full percentage point

Waukesha Public Schools' Enrollment

	Total (7-12)	Total (7-12) Foreign Language	% in F.L.
Fall 1975	6,423	1,998	31
Fall 1976	6,607	1,901	29
Fall 1977	6,565	1,943	30
Fall 1978	6,527	2,113	32
Fall 1979	6,377	2,325	36
Fall 1980	6,157	2,398	39
Fall 1981	6,223	2,311	37
Fall 1982	6,191	2,429	39